

# **ACCESS DENIED**

## **BARRIERS TO ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION FOR CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES**

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Because Freedom Can't Protect Itself

# Presentation Overview

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- **Online Voter Registration**
  - Benefits
  - Why Access is Important
- **Report Findings**
  - How the states did
  - Most Common Barriers and How to Fix Them
  - The Good News (yes, there is good news)
- **Recommendations**
- **Looking Forward – Next Issue in On-Line Access**

# Online Voter Registration

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Online voter registration is:

- More accurate
- More efficient
- Less expensive

In short, online voter registration is the inevitable future of voter registration.

# Why Worry About Accessibility?

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## It's a good idea:

- One in five voters has a disability
- 8.1 million Americans have difficulty seeing.
- 6.7 million Americans have difficulty grasping objects
- 10.6 million Americans have some type of cognitive or learning disability

# Why Worry About Accessibility?

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## It's the law:

- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires equal access to government services and programs as well as effective communication.
- An online voter registration system is a government service that must be equally available to people with disabilities.

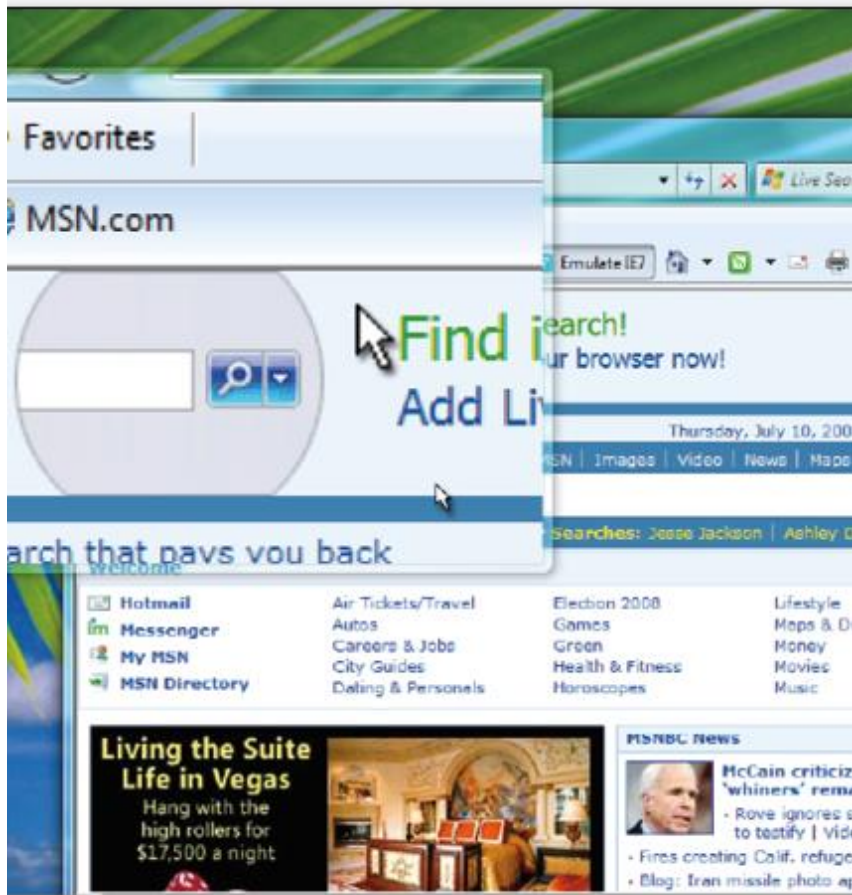
# What IS website accessibility?

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**Website accessibility is the measure of a webpage's usability by people with one or more disabilities.**

There are myriad disabilities, and just as many ways that people adapt – or use adaptive technology – to use the web.

What follows are three of the more common examples.



**For people with low or limited vision...**

*Screen magnifier software makes the screen visible for people ... but the screen can show only a portion of the webpage at a time.*



**For people with upper body mobility disabilities, they may use...**

- *a mouth stick to control the computer, OR*
- *voice recognition software to direct the computer's keystrokes.*





## For people with no vision...

- *screen reader software creates access to a computer and to the web.*
- *Screen readers convert text and code to a synthesized voice.*



# So, how IS online access?

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The ACLU asked the Center for Accessible Technology to do a brief review:

- 20 States – cursory visit
- 6 States – more in-depth review

Of the 20 states, some were better, others were worse, but only ONE had full accessibility.

# Most Common Barriers

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- Inaccessible forms
- Poor navigation
- Inaccessible images
- Poor website design – or the “duh” factors.
  - Text that is too small
  - Color contrast that is too low
  - Language that is too ‘high falutin’

# Report Card

	California	Utah	Minnesota	Kansas	Ohio	Missouri
Forms	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Screen reader access	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Semantic organization	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Skip navigation	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Alt text	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail
Keyboard access	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail
Contrast	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Pass
Text size and scaling	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail
Tab order	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail

# The Good News

**Website accessibility is NOT rocket science.**

Correcting the mistakes identified in the report range from “very easy” to “well within the capabilities of the people who designed and coded the existing voter registration sites.”

# Recommendations:

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1. The EAC can serve an important role in reminding states of their obligations to make online voter registration accessible.
2. For existing sites: Have a full audit by access experts, and remove barriers.
3. For new sites: Include access experts in designing the website in the first place – this is even simpler and cheaper than re-designing an existing site.

# Online Voter Registration: Next Access Issues

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## **Electronic Signatures –**

Most states require an electronic signature on file for voter registration. Citizens who register to vote through the DMV has that signature on file automatically. But, for people who do not have a state issued driver's license or ID, states have used a variety of approaches to get the electronic signature.

The next access issue for us to tackle is to find – and advocate for - the approaches that are most accessible to people with disabilities.

# Next Access Issues

## Electronic Signature Options

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1. Print out, sign and mail in the online voter registration form.
2. Sign your name online using the mouse or your finger on a touchscreen.
3. Fill out the online form, and the Department of Elections will mail you a postcard to sign, that you mail back.
4. Fill out the online form, and provide your signature at the polling place.
5. Take a photo of your signature with a smart phone, and email the photo to the Department of Elections.
6. Don't require a signature, just use a Social Security Number.



# Thank you!



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[www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)

The HTML and Accessible PDF  
versions of the report are at:

[www.aclu.org/report/access-denied-barriers-online-voter-registration-citizens-disabilities](http://www.aclu.org/report/access-denied-barriers-online-voter-registration-citizens-disabilities)